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SUBJECT: Mobility of Civilians in the Field Mixed; Will be Strained by Civilian Increase

¶1. (SBU) Begin Summary. U.S. civilian personnel in the field under Chief of Mission (COM) authority are getting off their bases and engaging with Afghan government (GIRoA) officials and civil society with varying frequency. Those in self-drive locations have the greatest freedom of movement, followed by those in U.S.-led PRTs and other installations. U.S. civilians at coalition-led PRTs that are not self-drive face bigger challenges, given those PRTs limited resources to support travel and the national objectives that may take priority. The increase of civilians in the field will further strain resources, and we will closely monitor and report whether our COM personnel in the field are receiving the support they need to achieve their mission. The information provided below is based on a country-wide survey of COM personnel in the field conducted by the Embassy from September 26-29. End Summary.

Self Drive Posts

¶2. (SBU) In self-drive locations, officers are well-equipped to get off the base for meetings and engagements with provincial-level government officials. Getting beyond provincial capitals, however, can be challenging in provinces like Badghis, Kunduz, and Ghor. Typically, these officers travel daily to meetings beyond the PRT. Activities by PRT officers include regular meetings with GIRoA officials, project oversight, and engagement with civil society.

¶3. (SBU) At the self-drive locations, officers often rely on coalition partners to move beyond the provincial capital. In the case of Ghor province, the PRT officer noted that the Lithuanians have been providing increased support, allowing him to join them on patrols out to the districts twice in the past three weeks. In Bamyan, where freedom of movement is good across the Province, the PRT officer reports visits to three districts this week with UNAMA to undertake rule of law assessments. As part of this travel, they will have meetings with district governors, chiefs of police, prosecutors, local shura leaders. Similarly, in Panjshir, the PRT officer reports no difficulty getting off the base and around the province. Typically, though, when he travels to the districts he drives his own vehicle with a larger military convoy.

U.S.-Led PRTs

¶3. (SBU) The Embassy is in the process of coordinating with ISAF a military order that would implement the August 12 agreement (MOA) between Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal on provision of secure transport for Chief of Mission (COM) personnel in the field. That MOA provides for three missions per day per assigned mission personnel at a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) or District Support Team unless the local commander and local senior civilian jointly agree on a revised mission plan based on security and operational requirements. The military order under discussion would require implementation of this agreement by all U.S. Forces. It

also would recommend that coalition partners provide similar support to civilians based at the PRT or district level.

**14.** (SBU) Currently, officers based at U.S.-led Brigade Task Forces and PRTs report movement beyond their respective bases anywhere between two and five times per week. For example in Logar, the civilian assigned to the Task Force reports spending a minimum of two-three days per week meeting with various Afghan government officials. These visits often include stopping by a new or on-going development project with the respective coalition force unit that is assigned to the location. He also spends about one day per week talking with average Afghans about everyday events in their local markets or other community gathering locations. According to other officers at U.S.-led PRTs, this is fairly typical of their weekly tempo of activities beyond the base. The PRT officer in Paktika, who covers USAID programs, reports that she goes on about three-four missions per week. As many of them require land and watershed assessments, she often spends about 30-90 minutes walking along irrigation canals and through agricultural areas.

**15.** (SBU) Travel can be challenging, however, in many cases. Implementation of the new three trips per day requirement will undoubtedly test the limits of what is possible given current resources. In Ghazni, for example, the PRT officer notes that he travels about two-three times per week, which is much less than he would like. Limiting factors include: justifying a mission that requires significant planning and human resources, and the fact that many contacts do not want to be seen with coalition forces for security reasons. In many cases, individuals and groups/shuras have declined the offer of the PRT officers to visit them and instead preferred to come to the PRT.

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**16.** (SBU) The officer assigned to Task Force Warrior, based in Bagram, notes that the real issue is not whether officers can get out, but whether they can get out in a way that allows them to do their jobs. She points out that the military looks at such visits in terms of "Key Leader Engagement (KLE)," while civilians think in terms of relationships, networking, and partnering with Afghans to achieve common objectives. For example, she noted that a recent visit to the Albironi Law School with the Rule of Law officer will be meaningless unless they follow up with numerous meetings to implement the goals discussed in this original outreach meeting.

Coalition-led PRTs

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**17.** (SBU) In coalition-led PRTs in the South, mobility can be a particular challenge. The unique issues of the PRT in Helmand are reported reftel. In the Dutch-led PRT in Uruzgan, the PRT officer reports that mobility is a major problem. The PRT officer will travel with the Dutch this week to the Chora district for a shura on the deteriorating security condition there, and to lend support to the Police Chief as he announces a replacement for the district police chief who was assassinated. He also will travel to the governor's compound this week for a weekly security meeting. In Kandahar, the PRT officers travelled beyond the PRT four times during the past week for engagements with GIROA (e.g. Kandahar Governor Weesa and the head of the Provincial Council Ahmed Wali Karzai) and a visit to Dand district, where the Canadians have a major district development effort underway.

**18.** (SBU) The USDA officer in Helmand Province highlighted the mobility challenges faced in Helmand (see reftel). He notes that the USDA and USAID officers travelled from the PRT only once in the last week, which took the form of a rotary air flight to the district of Garmsir to roll out the Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus program in that district. He lamented that the one ground movement scheduled was cancelled due to a lack of security assets at the PRT. The meeting, intended to focus on the Governor's Food Zone program, and specifically how to deal with saplings and vines, ended up being cancelled due to the inability of the U.S. officers to attend.

Comment

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19. (SBU) Mobility in many parts of Afghanistan is highly restricted, but on balance our COM personnel in the field are able to travel and engage the GIRoA and civil society and oversee projects in the field. The increase of civilians in the field will undoubtedly strain resources and test the limits of the possible under current circumstances. Embassy will closely monitor and keep Washington informed on whether COM personnel need additional resources or other support. Where self-drive is permitted, our COM personnel are well positioned to continue to engage with the GIRoA and Afghan civil society in a sustained and regular manner. In those locations where civilians must rely on the U.S. military, the new order implementing the August 12 MOA should bring an enhanced level of support for civilian missions off the base. One challenge, however, will be ensuring that civilians are given adequate authority to shape missions that advance civilian objectives, while still fitting into the larger operational and security requirements at the PRT. Mobility of U.S. COM personnel at coalition-led PRTs where self-drive is not permitted will likely remain a challenge. We can expect limited support for such travel as long as it fits into the national objectives and priorities of the nation leading the PRT.

EIKENBERRY